



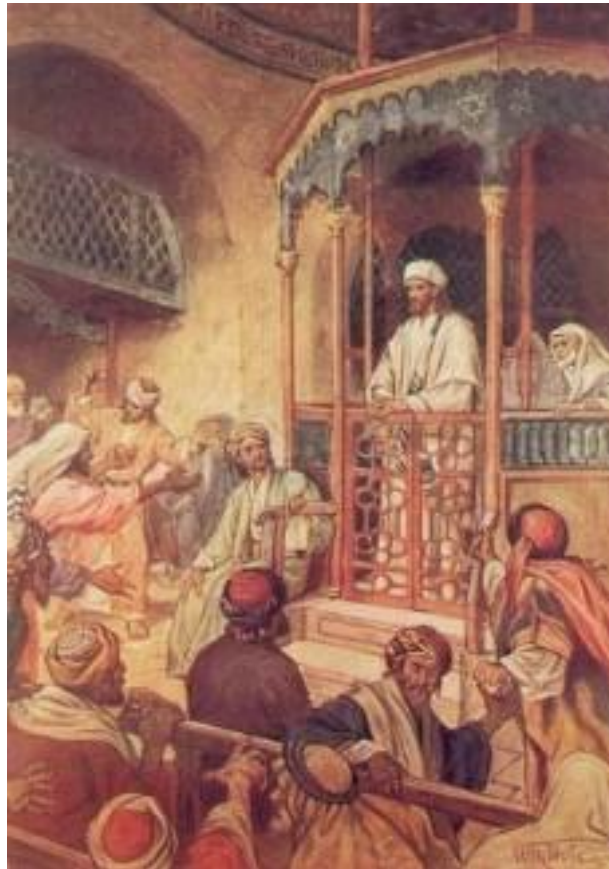
Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Breaking Open the Word Third Sunday of Ordinary Time C



Jesus in the Synagogue by William Hole, 1908. Public domain.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today is the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time. We hear of the early days of Jesus' ministry.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group. (@Five to seven minutes)

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings. (You may want to concentrate on the Gospel alone.)

First reading: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 8-10

- ▶ Nehemiah and Ezra read the scroll to the gathered assembly.
- ▶ The authors of Nehemiah possessed the conviction that Israel was called to be a worshiping community, a church. The purpose for their existence was to be a "liturgy", a divine service. In other words, their entire lives were to be devoted to the praise and thanks of God.
- ▶ Nehemiah was written after the Babylonian exile. Many Jews chose to remain in Babylon and tend to the lives they had carved for themselves in the land of exile. Others opted to return to Israel, to Jerusalem, to rebuild their Jewish identity. Their goal was to rebuild the sacral life of temple worship.
- ▶ However, work was cut out for the returning band of zealous religious refugees. During the exile some Jews had not been deported to Babylon but instead remained in Israel. They were not too thrilled at the prospect of religious leadership at the hands of the returning religious zealots. Those who remained in Israel during the exile had comfortably enculturated during the absence of the returning band. The tension between Samaritans and Jews began during this time of turmoil.
- ▶ Samaritans were Jews from the north that had remained in Israel during the exile. They were apprehensive that their Jewish counterparts were returning with an exaggerated sense of nationalism and were intent on governing the land. However, they reluctantly volunteered to help the returning Jews rebuild the temple. Their offer was refused and hostility between the two groups became pronounced.
- ▶ Jews believed the Samaritans to be corrupted by pagan influence during the exile. Samaritans believed the Jews to be driven by political rather than spiritual motives.
- ▶ The people were offering sacrifices not worthy of God. The prophets were crying for a return to sincerity. The prophetic books that preceded Nehemiah revealed a Jewish community torn by internal strife and division, poverty and religious apathy. Reform was critical.
- ▶ Ezra was considered a noted scribe of the law. His first task was to restore the family institution, the mainstay of Jewish identity and traditions. He demanded

strict adherence to the Law of Moses and refused to allow intermarriage. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Ezra climbed the elevated platform at the Water Gate of Jerusalem and read the law to the people who were standing from morning until evening. The next day the people erected their booths for the seven-day vigil. During the weeklong feast, the Torah continued to be proclaimed. The Levites (priests) interpreted the meaning of what was being proclaimed so the people could understand. At the end of the festival there was a ceremony of covenant renewal. The people confessed their sins and Ezra, “as covenant mediator” offered prayers to God on behalf of the people. All committed to the renewed covenant, an oath was signed by representatives of the people. Today’s reading reflects just such a liturgy.

- ▶ Under Ezra, the sacred Torah—the Law of Moses, molded the life and religion of Jews. The connection of this passage to the gospel is obscure. Some believe the only connection is due to the reading of the Torah in each scripture (Ezra in the first reading and Jesus in the gospel).



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ Judaism was in danger of extinction. Ezra and Nehemiah try to strengthen Jewish identity by demanding a strict observance of the law, by forbidding intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews. Some people who had stayed behind—who were not exiled and did not follow the law strictly during the exile, were upset. They did not want strict religious leaders telling them what to do. They had forged a pretty good life—who did these religious leaders think they were anyway? Why upset the applecart? How would you feel if you had been in the shoes of those who stayed in Israel during the exile only to have the leaders return and exert their authority over you and how you were supposed to live your life?
- ▶ How would you feel if you were the Jews who returned and saw your beloved Judaism in danger of extinction?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this reading? How could this possibly be a word for us today?

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12: 12-30

- ▶ A body though it has many parts is one body.
- ▶ “Is the Body of Christ a simile or an ontological reality”? It is both. Believers are “*like*” the body of Christ and they “*are*” the Body of Christ.
- ▶ Paul’s message asserts that they are *like* Christ’s Body because of the reality that

Christ had already risen and believers had not. Salvation was not a sure thing; it still required that one cooperate with its completion.

- ▶ Paul insisted that they “*are*” the Body of Christ because they were completely dependent upon his sovereignty over their lives. Just as an arm cannot exist unto itself, so believers cannot exist without Christ. The implications were total dedication and obedience to the person of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Some of the Corinthian members of the church (Gnostics), exercised ecstatic phenomena which they believed set them apart from other believers. Paul insisted that the greatest gift of all was not the gift of such phenomena, but rather the gift of love given by the Spirit. This gift of love drives all other gifts.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, surface brief insights in wider group.

- ▶ St Theresa said, “Christ has no body now but yours.” What evidence is there in your life that you are the hands and feet of Christ?

Gospel: Luke 1, 1-4;4, 14-21

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ This Sunday marks the beginning of Luke’s gospel. Today’s pericope sets the stage for the entire gospel. While the gospels are not actual biographies, Luke’s intent was to write an “orderly account” of the events of Jesus’ life and the subsequent life of the Church that followed him (Acts of the Apostles).
- ▶ Imagine it is Sunday morning. Our best lector or preacher rises, goes to the ambo, opens the lectionary, reads a familiar passage (one that we have heard repeatedly); we are lulled in the trance of unconscious half listening; and then, **POW!** We are thunderously brought to full, active, consciousness by the presumptuous upstart standing before us who dares to presume that the scripture just read refers directly to none other than himself! We would be calling the liturgy police!
- ▶ It is no wonder that in just a few later chapters the response of the religious elite is murder! They want to see him dead!

- ▶ Jesus' proclamation in the synagogue must have embodied the sacramental presence of God to his listeners. Otherwise, in fairness, it would be hard to blame his retractors. The power of the Spirit must have given such authority to his words, (the sacramental presence of God present in every Sunday proclamation of the Word even today), that to *not hear*, was worse than Israel's infidelity
- ▶ The second paragraph of this story lets us know that Jesus' ministry was driven by the power of the Holy Spirit—the same Spirit that came to him at his Baptism and was with him in the desert that strengthened him in the temptations. It is the same Spirit that authenticates his ministry--- The point? All could now rejoice in his Spirit-anointed ministry.
- ▶ Luke begins his gospel with Jesus in the synagogue. Jesus reveals his mission to the most difficult crowd of all--the hometown boys! He tells them that he is none other than the expected one from Isaiah's prophecy. It is Jesus-the local carpenter, son of Mary, the brother/cousin of relatives who is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.
- ▶ Jesus jumps in with both feet, right from the beginning. There is nothing tentative about his mission! He describes the ministry he has come to establish: preaching, liberation and healing.
- ▶ He is the fulfillment of all scripture. The last age is ushered in before their very eyes and ears!
- ▶ Through the proclamation of Isaiah, Jesus emphatically tells his audience that the messianic era had arrived. The jubilee year of liberation from debt described in the Isaiah passage was regarded as the messianic era.
- ▶ Luke establishes definitively that Jesus began his ministry with the full authority of the Spirit. His ministry embodied the restoration of justice that was to accompany the messianic age.
- ▶ All who experience the Messiah will know what it means to be released from the power of whatever oppresses and exercises control. Jesus' ministry of preaching, healing and exorcism clearly demands a new way of living in the reign of God.
- ▶ The mission of Jesus is the mission of the entire church. The Church shares Jesus' mission. Just as Jesus was baptized in the Holy Spirit at the River Jordan, the church is also baptized, initiated and empowered sacramentally by the presence of the risen Christ for the ministry of healing, preaching and exorcism. The Church is about the business of liberation and release.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example.

- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ In what way, if any, have you experienced or do you know of an example of Jesus' healing, preaching, and liberating mission to us?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that you are baptized into the healing, preaching and liberating mission of Christ? In what way might you be called to heal, preach and liberate others?
- ▶ Imagine one of your neighbors got up on Sunday and said he was none other than the long awaited Messiah---how would you respond? What must it have been like for Jesus' community? For his Mother? For his relatives? For him? With whom do you most relate?

Catechist shares first, and then invites participants to respond. (See appendix #3 or example)

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question (@ three minutes)

- ▶ What one thing are you willing to do this week to be a better disciple/prophet in your world? Is there something that needs to change in your life?

Concluding Prayer

Option 1. Celebrate a minor rite—an exorcism or blessing for catechumens: RCIA 90-97

Option 2. Pray the Prayer of Pope Clement

Option 3. Other suitable, but brief prayer. (Perhaps pray the Prayer of St. Francis.)

Appendix

#1. One of the profound lessons in this reading is the importance of the stories, customs and religious symbols of specific religious traditions. If the Jewish leaders had not enforced a strict adherence to Judaism, its stories and religious practices, it is very likely it would have died out. Judaism was watered down as a result of exile and subsequent enculturation that it was in danger of extinction.

I understand when religious traditions sometimes take extreme measures to safeguard their practices and history. This reading is a lesson for me to honor our symbols, Scriptures and Catholic faith and life and treasure it lest it become diminished due to lack of use and relativism. Ezra and Nehemiah's return to strict adherence of the Law seems harsh to our modern sensibilities. However, they probably saved Judaism as a result of their actions. God no doubt led their decision. The Spirit leads the Church today.

#2. We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ--sometimes in small ways and other times in much larger than life ways. Just this past week I counseled a woman who had not received communion in several months because of a theology she thought she heard from a Sunday pulpit that was not consonant with her understanding of Eucharist. What she heard disgusted her. We were able to sort through what she heard and determine that what she heard is not what the Church really teaches and that concentrating on such things are in truth distractions from our relationship with Jesus. Weeks of doubt, fear and confusion were abated in that intimate conversation between two members of Christ's Body. I was given the privilege of ministering to this woman --of being the healing, teaching Christ to her. Such is the gift of the Mystical body of Christ.

3. I am called to heal, preach and liberate others as a result of my baptism. How do I accomplish that? Every time God places a broken or wounded human being in my path I am fulfilling the call of my baptism. (Remember, Jesus has no hands or feet now but ours!)

A few years ago a friend of mine was newly married. I was a part of their lives throughout the dating and engagement period. After a year or so the man decided he did not want to be married any more. He broke her heart. Every night she would come to my house and we would talk, cry and grieve together. I would hold her as she sobbed.

After several months of working through her grief she and I went to church very late one night. She wrote all the painful memories in a journal. We burned the pages and prayed for a release from her rage, her immense grief and the bondage of the relationship. God freed her and she was able to pick up the pieces and forge a wonderful new life. I was simply there to walk with her in her grief--to be an agent of healing, to lead her to God's healing waters. I did not heal her. God healed her. I helped preside at the ritual of release and I helped carry her through the worst times. I feel humbled and blessed to have participated in Jesus' healing, preaching, teaching, reconciling and liberating mission. Such is the call of our baptismal life—to be the presence of Christ.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Salvation
Jesus Christ
Kingdom of God

Evangelization
Baptism
Revelation

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the index of doctrinal topics and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

SALVATION

Jesus tells his audience in the synagogue that the Messiah they had been waiting for had finally arrived and that he was that Messiah. He was there to usher in the salvation God had promised. Jesus Christ, Savior of the World. We get a glimpse of the early days of his mission in today's Gospel. Sadly the Messiah they were looking for is not the Messiah they received. Many missed what God was doing right under their noses. We are saved by the power of his sacrifice. Jesus continues to save us. Today's session will address the Church's teaching on SALVATION.

JESUS CHRIST

Jesus told the gathered assembly in the synagogue that he was the long awaited Messiah. He inaugurates his saving mission. It is an appropriate time to reflect on the fullness of Jesus and his mission. Thus today we will focus our doctrinal session on JESUS CHRIST.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus told the gathered assembly in the synagogue that he was the long awaited Messiah. He inaugurates his saving mission. He inaugurates the kingdom he came to establish. He reminds them of the kingdom God promised with the advent of the Messiah. It is an appropriate time to reflect on the fullness of Jesus and his mission. Thus today we will focus our doctrinal session on the KINGDOM OF GOD.

EVANGELIZATION

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God as he preached in the synagogue. Jesus inaugurates his saving mission as he reminds the community that he is the long awaited Messiah. The implications for us is that we are to continue to establish his kingdom in our midst as we too proclaim the Good News and tell the wonders of the kingdom. Each of us is called to evangelize the world. Thus today's extended session will address the doctrinal issue of EVANGELIZATION.

BAPTISM

Today's liturgy remembers and makes present the inauguration of Jesus ministry. He tells the gathered assembly that he is the long awaited Messiah who has come to establish the kingdom. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on baptism that incorporates us into the kingdom he came to establish. Today's extended doctrinal session will focus on the sacrament of BAPTISM.

REVELATION I or II

Jesus told the gathered assembly in the synagogue that he was the long awaited Messiah. He preached the Scriptures to them. He revealed God's saving plan for the world. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on God's revelation to the world through Sacred Scripture.